

A "Poker Game" Of Nuclear Giants

By Marquis Childs

IN THE great nuclear poker game the two principal players are being prodded by eager beavers. Table stakes in the present round are bigger than ever and whether the game goes to a showdown is the most important single decision in this year of decisions.

The President hopes that by negotiation with Moscow both nuclear giants will agree to forswear installing anti-ballistic missile systems. The cost for each side will be not less than \$30 billion and probably a great deal more. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara is convinced that with each side raising the offensive ante as defense systems are installed the effort will be entirely wasted.

The latest prodding comes from Dr. Harold M. Agnew, weapons division leader, at the Los Alamos scientific laboratory in New Mexico. This is where the nuclear age came to birth and a powerful team of scientists has worked ever since on more and more advanced weapons systems. Speaking at the recent Air Force Association convention in San Francisco and in a subsequent interview, Agnew urged an immediate go ahead with an ABM system.

IN HIS curious speech Agnew spoke out against a balance of terror and argued for going ahead with any and all developments that would increase America's superiority. "If we are to maintain the superiority which has guaranteed our dominant power position during the last 20 years," he said, "the United States must continue to innovate, offensively as well as defensively, and accept the consequence of this policy in terms of any slight provocations which might arise."

Agnew said he was speaking as a citizen rather than as leader of the weapons division. But, whether intended or not, his was the voice of a powerful scientific complex with a direct stake in the unceasing development of every potential weapon born in the laboratory. The familiar argument is that these scientific teams will be broken up if they are not allowed to work. After all, he said in a telephone conversation with this reporter, you can't mothball people.

In his speech he quoted Soviet authorities who believe just as Agnew does that every new weapons development must be pushed to its logical conclusion. This is evidence, if evidence were needed, that the same kind of military-scientific complex is without doubt making the same kind of argument in the Soviet Union against any standstill whether in offensive or defensive weapons. This is one of the formidable obstacles in the way of an agreement to hold off on a defensive missile system.

But it is far from being the only obstacle. Interestingly enough, Agnew chose to speak to the Air Force Association. In his warning in his farewell address against the unwarranted influence of the military-industrial complex, former President Eisenhower could well have had the Association in mind. The governing body, the Council, is a tight, interlocking directorate of the highest officers in the Air Force and the aircraft industry. The industry largely underwrites the Association.

THE POWER of the big defense contractors to influence the ABM decision is great. A recent advertisement by an investment analysis firm was headed "Nike X: \$30 billion for whom?" It listed 28 companies with large defense contracts that "could profit handsomely" if a full-scale ABM system is installed. Fred Collins in the *New Republic* broke this down to show that companies on the list have 300 plants in 42 states and 172 congressional districts, with a minimum of 1 million employees. That adds up to a lot of political influence and particularly if a recession slows employment.

Agnew advocates a "first step" to protect America's Minute Men missile sites with some protection for 10 cities. As with all such massive programs, however, the first step is invariably followed by other giant steps. The bill for this first step is put at between \$3 to \$4 billion with the likelihood this would be doubled by operational costs.

After all, Agnew says, we've proved we can spend large amounts on the war in Southeast Asia, so why is such a sum any hindrance? But, as McNamara has made clear to congressional committees, that is merely a down payment on a price tag that will eventually be at least \$40 billion.

Sober, knowledgeable men, Secretary McNamara among them, have looked into that pit. They see if the newest round in the nuclear race is not forestalled a garrison state and a spiraling Fred Collins in the *New Republic* broke threat of nuclear war.

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